

**Listing of Claims:**

1 - 27 (Canceled)

28 (Currently Amended) A method for dispensing and evidencing postage indicia by a postage generating device (PGD) in a system having a plurality of PGDs that have been divided into n groups identified by a group designation  $G_i$ ,  $i = 1, \dots, n$ , the method performed by the indicia generating devices comprising:

- (a) receiving a master secret key  $K$  and a secret key  $K_i$  from a distribution center over a network after manufacture, and storing the master secret key  $K$  and the secret key  $K_i$  in the PGD;
- (b) in response to receiving a request to generate an indicium for a mail piece destined for a particular postal destination  $Dest$ , generating the indicium;
- (c) computing a verification key  $V_i^{Dest}$  as a function of the secret key  $K_i$  and the postal destination;
- (d) computing a key ID  $I_i^{Dest}$  as a function of the master secret key  $K$  and the postal destination;
- (e) using the computed verification key  $V_i^{Dest}$  to create a digital signature for the indicia; and
- (f) digitally signing the indicia by including the digital signature and the computed key ID  $I_i^{Dest}$  on the indicia.

29 (Original) The method of claim 28 further including the step of computing each verification key  $V_i^{Dest}$  as a one-way function  $H$  of the PGD group key  $K_i$  and a designation of the postal destination:

$$V_i^{Dest} = H(K_i, Dest).$$

30 (Original) The method of claim 29 further including the step of using ZIP codes to designate the postal destination.

31 (Original) The method of claim 30 further including the step of computing each of the key ID's as a one-way function  $H$  of the PGD group,  $G_i$ , the master secret key,  $K$ , and a designation of the postal destination,  $Dest$ .